

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9775

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 6771

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, PINT, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. DESPITE A NUMBER OF DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE WEEK, COLOMBIANS GENERALLY LOOKED AHEAD TO THE OPENING OF CONGRESS ON JULY 20, WHICH PROMISES TO BE A LIVELY SESSION, INCLUDING AN OPEN FIGHT OVER THE ELECTION OF A COMPTROLLER GENERAL AND A POSSIBLE REBELLION BY A MAJORITY OF LIBERALS AGAINST A LOPEZ COMMITMENT THAT THE NEW COMPTROLLER GENERAL WOULD BE A CONSERVATIVE. THE STATE OF SIEGE HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON, AND WAS SCARCELY NOTICEABLE TO MOST COLOMBIANS. A CRACKDOWN ON CRIMINAL ELEMENTS CONTINUED, BUT SO DID KIDNAPPINGS, CONCERN OVER WHICH REPORTEDLY HAD BEEN THE KEY MOTIVE IN THE PRESIDENT'S DECLARING THE EMERGENCY. THE GOVERNMENT'S SENSITIVITY TO THE ISSUE WAS ILLUSTRATED BY ITS BAN OF THE PLAYING OF A POPULAR SONG, TITLED "THE KIDNAPPING" ON RADIO AND TELEVISION. THE EXPLOITS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST ILLICH RAMIREZ SANCHEZ (NICK-NAMED "THE JACKAL" RECEIVED HEAVY PRESS COVERAGE, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT APPEARED FOR A WHILE THAT THE "JACKAL" MIGHT BE A COLOMBIAN, REFLECTING A PERVERSE PRIDE IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF A NATIVE SON. THE EXPULSION OF CUBAN DIPLOMATS BY FRENCH AUTHORITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE JACKAL WAS ALSO REPORTED BUT ELICITED SCANT EDITORIAL

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COMMENT, PERHAPS SURPRISING IN VIEW OF THE IMMINENT ESTABLISHMENT OF A CUBAN EMBASSY IN BOGOTA. VARIOUS SOURCES REPORTED THAT THE CUBANS WILL ARRIVE AT THE END OF JULY OR EARLY AUGUST. BY THE END OF THE WEEK, HOWEVER, THE U.S. AND SOVIET SPACE LAUNCHES AND LINKUP DOMINATED THE NEWS. THE SAN JOSE OAS CONFERENCE RECEIVED GOOD COVERAGE ALTHOUGH LESS THAN THAT ACCORDED THE QUITO CONFERENCE IN WHICH COLOMBIA'S ROLE WAS MORE EMINENT. THE PRESS GENERALLY PREDICTED THE PASSAGE OF A FREEDOM OF ACTION RESOLUTION ON CUBAN SANCTIONS. END SUMMARY

2. CONGRESS PREPARES FOR ORDINARY SESSION. COLOMBIAN LEGISLATORS SPENT THE WEEK PREPARING FOR THE OPENING OF THE ORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS JULY 20. LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATES FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE SENATE AND THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES BUSIED THEMSELVES LINING UP VOTES. MOST OBSERVERS

ANTICIPATED THAT FORMER JUSTICE MINISTER ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO WOULD BE ELECTED TO LEAD THE CHAMBER WHILE LIBERAL PARTY DIRECTORATE MEMBER GUSTAVO BALCAZAR WOULD BECOME SENATE PRESIDENT. THE PROBABLE REMOVAL OF THE "LABOR PACKAGE" FROM CONGRESSIONAL HANDS (SEE BELOW) STILL LEAVES THAT INSTITUTION WITH PLENTY OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES TO CONSIDER, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WILL BE THE ELECTION OF THE NEW COMPTROLLER GENERAL (BOGOTA 2411). THIS WILL BE ONE OF THE FIRST TASKS OF THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES. PRESIDENT LOPEZ HAS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS COMMITTED THE LIBERAL PARTY TO THE ELECTION OF A CONSERVATIVE COMPTROLLER GENERAL. ACCORDING TO CONSERVATIVE CONGRESSMAN HERNANDO BARJUCH, WHO SHORTLY WILL DEPART FOR IRAN AS COLOMBIA'S AMBASSADOR, SEVERAL LIBERAL REPRESENTATIVES TRIED DURING THE WEEK TO CONVINCE THE CONSERVATIVES TO RENOUNCE THEIR CLAIM TO THE COMPTROLLER GENERALSHIP, APPARENTLY BECAUSE OF GROWING SENTIMENT AMONG LIBERALS TO DISREGARD LOPEZ'S COMMITMENT AND ELECT A FELLOW LIBERAL. TO DO SO WOULD BE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE PRESIDENT. BARJUCH TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THE CONSERVATIVES REFUSED, SAYING THAT IF THE LIBERALS WISHED TO USE THEIR MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER TO ELECT A LIBERAL, THEY WOULD HAVE TO DO IT ON THEIR OWN. MEANWHILE, THE LIBERAL EL ESPECTADOR EDITORIALIZED FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A

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CONSERVATIVE TO THAT OFFICE. THUS THE STAGE APPEARED SET FOR A CONTROVERSIAL BEGINNING OF THE CONGRESSIONAL SESSION. DURING THE SESSION BOTH HOUSES WILL PROBABLY PASS FOR THE SECOND TIME, AS REQUIRED BY THE CONSTITUTION AN AMENDMENT GRANTING 18 YEAR OLDS THE RIGHT TO VOTE, ALTHOUGH THE MEASURE IS EXPECTED TO HAVE MORE OPPOSITION THAN IT DID LAST SESSION. PROPOSALS CONCERNING CIVIL MARRIAGES AND ABORTION WHICH THE CONGRESS WILL DEBATE, HAVE ALREADY SPARKED STRONG

NEGATIVE REACTIONS PARTICULARLY FROM THE CHURCH
HIERARCHY.

3. THE CHURCH TO THE BARRICADES. USING THE 21ST
EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE (JULY 14-18) AS A FORUM, THE
COLOMBIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS LAUNCHED AN OFFENSIVE
AGAINST WHAT IT SEES AS THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE FAMILY
IN COLOMBIA. THE CHURCH HIERARCHY HAS SCORDD DIVORCE
AND ABORTION IN PARTICULAR AND IS OBVIOUSLY KICKING OFF ITS
CAMPAGIN AGAINST SOON TO BE INTRODUCED LEGISLTATION PERMITTING
DIVORCE FOR CIVIL MARRIAGES AND ABORTION IN LIMITED CASES.
THE CONFEREES WELL PUBLICIZED SPEECHES AND POSITION PAPERS
HAVE BEEN NOTABLY UNYIELDING IN DEFENDING THE CHURCH'S POSI-
TIONS, WHICH OBSERVERS BELIEVE IS AIMED AT REMINDING COLOMBIA'S
CATHOLICS OF THE CHURCH'S PREEMINENCE IN QUESTIONS OF MORALITY.
THE FAITHFUL HAVE ALSO BEEN TOLD THAT, WHILE THE NEW CONCORDATE
(BOGOTA 6228) PERMITS THE STATE TO PERFORM CIVIL MARRIAGES
WITHOUT REGARD TO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, THE CHURCH WILL NOT
RECOGNIZE SUCH MARRIAGES BETWEEN CAHTOLICS. IN A MOVE RARE
THESE DAYS, CARDINAL MUNOZ ALSO STEPPED INTO THE POLITICAL
WORLD AND ANNOUNCED THE CHURCH'S OPPOSITION TO THE 18-YEAR
OLD VOTE. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE FIRM AND LOUD
DECLARATIONS BY THE BISHOPS ARE AIMED NOT ONLY AT PROTECTING
THE COUNTRY'S MORAL FABRIC BUT ALSO AT RALLYING THE FAITHFUL
TO THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION AND ELEMENT OF INFLUENCE
TO PRESERVE ITS DECLINING ROLE IN COLOMBIAN SOCIETY.

4. PRESIDENT LOPEZ WILL USE EXTROARDINARY POWERS TO
ENACT LABOR REFORMS. A TYPICAL COLOMBIAN SOLUTION WAS
FOUND DURING THE WEEK FOR THE GROWING CONTROVERSY OVER THE
SO-CALLED "LABOR PACKAGE" (BOGOTA A-75) WHICH THE CONGRESS
WAS EXPECTED TO DEBATE DURING THE SESSION BEGINNING
JULY 20. THE NATIONAL SALARY COUNCIL, WHICH HAD BEEN CON-
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VENED BY THE LABOR MINISTER IN EARLY JUNE TO PERMIT LABOR,
MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES TO REACH A CON-
SENSUS POSITION ON THE VARIOUS PROPOSALS TO RECOMMEND TO THE
CONGRESS, HAD RUN INTO TROUBLE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY WHEN BUSINESS
REPRESENTATIVES BOYCOTTED THE MEETINGS CLAIMING THE COUNCIL
WAS NOT THE PROPER BODY TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSALS. UPON THE
MINISTER'S RETURN FROM THE ILO CONFERENCE IN GENEVA, SHE RE-
CONVENED THE PARTIES AND PREVAILED ON THEM TO RECOMMEND
TO CONGRESS THAT THAT BODY GRANT THE PRESIDENT EXTRAORDINARY
POWERS TO DECREE LABOR REFORMS. UNION OF COLOMBIAN
WORKERS (UTC) AND COLOMBIAN WORKERS CONFEDERATION (CTC) REPRE-
SENTATIVES TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THEY AGREED TO THE MINISTER'S
INITIATIVE BECAUSE IT IMPROVES THEIR CHANCES OF GETTING LABOR
REFORMS WHEY WANT, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHICH WOULD PROMOTE
INDUSTRIAL UNIONS, AND STOPPING THOSE THEY DO NOT WANT, SUCH

AS A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF HOLIDAYS, AND AN ANNUAL
AUTOMATIC READJUSTMENT OF WAGES. BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES
ARE APPARENTLY PLEASED WITH THE PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE

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ACTION ARA-10

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CONTROVERSY BECAUSE THIS WILL PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE
PRES AND MAKE IT MORE LIKELY THAT A SO CALLED PENSION
REFORM WHICH WOULD BE VERY COSTLY TO BUSINESSES WILL
NOT BE ENACTED. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE LARGE LIBERAL
PARTY MAJORITIES IN THE CONGRESS WILL GIVE
THE PRES THE SPECIAL POWERS. THIS CONGRESS EARLIER
GRANTED PRES LOPEZ SIMILAR AUTHORITY TO REORGANIZE THE
COMPTROLLER GEN'S OFFICE. THE PREVIOUS CONGRESS GAVE
PRES PASTRANA EXTRAORDINARY POWERS TO REORGANIZE
THE PUBLIC ADMIN SYSTEM.

6. CHANGE OF RECTORS AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. LUIS
EDUARDO MESA VELASQUEZ, RECENTLY NAMED SUCCEST 59)78 :-4)9
PEREZ AS RECTOR OF THE NATIONAL UNIV (BOGOTA
6480), FORMALLY ACCEPTED THE NEW POST ON JULY 15. HE WILL TAKE
OVER THE UNIV AFTER A BRIEF OVERLAP WITH OUT-
GOING RECTOR PEREZ. MESA, A LOPISTA LIBERAL, HAS PRONOUNCED
HIMSELF IN ACCORD WITH THE PAST POLICIES OF THE MARXIST
PEREZ AND HIS PERFORMANCE AS RECTOR OF THE UNIV OF
ANTIOQUIA INDICATES A PEREZ-LIKE STYLE OF ACCOMMODATION IN
DEALINGS WITH THE STUDENT BODY. FEW OBSERVERS EXPECT MANY

CHANGES UNDER MESA
BEYOND PERSONNEL REPLACEMENTS AND THE REMOVAL OF
THE MARXIST STAMP FROM THE UNIV ADMIN. IN THE
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MEANTIME, HOWEVER, PREPARATIONS FOR THE CHANGE
IN RECTORS ARE ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES. PEREZ, WHO WANTS
TO TURN OVER A CLEAN SLATE TO MESA, REQUESTED PRO FORMA
RESIGNATIONS FROM THE VICE RECTORS AND DEANS ALONG WITH
LISTS OF POSSIBLE REPLACEMENTS. ONLY TWO DEANS
HAVE COMPLIED. THE REMAINING OFFICIALS INSIST
THAT THEY MUST FIRST CONSULT WITH STUDENTS AND
FACULTY CONCERNING ANY CHANGES. THIS REBELLIOUS MOVE
SIGNALS THE REOPENING OF THE STRUGGLE TO ACHIEVE
STUDENT FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN
ADMIN DECISION-MAKING AT THE UNIV. FURTHER
AGITATION CAN BE EXPECTED ONCE THE NEW SEMESTER BEGINS
IN AUG. ON JULY 17, 600 STUDENTS FROM
THE COLLEGE OF ARTS BLOCKED THE ADMIN BUILDING
FOR THREE HOURS ACCUSING PEREZ OF DEMAGOGUERY AND
DENOUNCING HIS PROLONGATION IN OFFICE.
ONCE THE DARLING OF THE LEFTIST DOMINATED STUDENTS AND
FACULTY, PEREZ APPEARS TO HAVE LOST HIS
MAGIC.

6. BOGOTA CONSERVATIVE DAILY TO CLOSE. CONSERVATIVE BOGOTA
DAILY, EL SIGLO, BESET WITH ECONOMIC AND PERSONNEL
PROBLEMS FOR OVER A YEAR IS EXPECTED TO CLOSE SOON FOR
SEVERAL WEEKS AND REOPEN AFTER INTERNAL REORGANIZATION.
FINANCIAL LOSSES OF THE PAPER HAVE FORRCED THE OWNING CORPORATION
TO DISSOLVE ITSELF IN ORDER TO CHANGE ITS LEGAL
CHARTER AND FIND NEW FINAN SUPPORT. AT THE SAME TIME,
THE PAPER'S MANAGING EDITOR SAYS PRIVATELY THAT THE PAPER'S
CLOSING WILL BE USED TO LEGALLY SEPARATE ALL EMPLOYEES IN
ORDER TO RID THE PAPER OF A NUMBER OF LEFTIST AGITATORS
WHO HAVE BEEN TRYING TO FORM AN INDEPENDENT UNION
AND CHANGE THE PAPER'S CONSERVATIVE FOCUS. THE EDITOR
CLAIMS THAT THE INDEPENDENT UNION THAT HAS CAUSED THE PAPER'S
INTERNAL PROBLEMS DURING THE PAST EIGHT MONTHS WAS
INSPIRED AND IS SUPPORTED BY THE SOVEMB HERE. THE
HISTORY OF THE ORG, HOWEVER, INDICATES THAT IT IS
MOST LIKELY INDEPENDENT. IF THE PAPER FAILS TO REOPEN,
IT WILL LEAVE BOGOTA WITH ONE CONSERVATIVE NEWS-

PAPER, LA REPUBLICA, SUPPORTED BY THE OSPINA FAMILY. THAT
PAPER HAS TRADITIONALLY SUPPORTED THE PASTRANA FACTION
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OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, WHILE EL SIGLO HAS SUPPORTED ALVARO GOMEZ.

7. COOP MOVEMENT REJECTS GOVT CONTROL. THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT MADE NEWS DURING THE WEEK WITH STATEMENTS BY THE NATIONAL COOPERATIVES SUPERINTENDENT, MARCO TULIO RODRIGUEZ, THAT THE GOC WOULD MAKE A MWIBR EFFORT TO PROMOTE COOPERATIVES AS A MEANS OF ASSISTING THE COUNTRY'S POOR AND ACCUSATIONS BY COOPERATIVE LEADERS THAT THE GOVT WAS ATTEMPTING TO IMPOSE ITS CONTROL OVER THE HISTORICALLY DEMOCRATIC AND INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT. THE PAST INVOLVEMENT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT WITH MARXIST CAUSES HAS MADE HIS MOTIVES ESPECIALY SUSPICIOUS TO MANY COOPERATIVE LEADERS. THE MOVEMENT HAS A LONG TRADITION OF BEING BOTH VERY INDEPENDENT AND RATHER UNIMPORTANT. THE GOC, HOWEVER SEES THE MOVRENT AS A MEANS OF REDUCING FOOD COSTS TO URBAN WORKERS THROUGH COOPERATIVE RETAIL OUTLETS, AND AS A MEANS OF PROVIDING CREDIT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE RURAL POORQL A LONG TERM PLAN HAS BEEN DRAWN UP BY THE GOC AND CREDIT MADE AVAILABLE FOR COOPERATIVES. THE GOVT HAS ATTEMPTED TO IMPLEMENT ITS CONCEPTION OF THE DESIRABLE DIRECTION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT THROUGH INFORMAL AGREEMENTS WITH THE MAJOR COOP FEDERATIONS AND THROUGH CONTROL OF THE COOPERATIVES FINANCING AGENCY, FINANCIACOO. THE HEAVY HANDEDNESS OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY IN DOING SO, HOWEVER, HAS SPARKED THE RESENTMENT OF MANY OF THE MOVEMENT'S LEADERS, AND THE GOC STRATEGY SUFFERED A SETBACK LAST WEEK WHEN A GOVT-BACKED SLATE OF ELECTORS FOR THE FINANCIACOO BOARD OF DIRECTORS WAS DEFEATED BY A DISSIDENT GROUP. IT NOW REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER OR NOT THE GOC WILL MAINTAIN ITS ENTHUSIASM FOR PROMTING A MOVEMENT THAT IT CANNOT CONTROL.

8. PASTRANA DEFENDS HIS ECONOMIC POLICY. EX-PRES PASTRANA BORRERO DEFENDED HIS ECONOMIC POLICY AND CRITICIZED PRES LOPEZ FOR CHANGING THE PRIORITIES OF HIS "FOUR ECONOMIC STRATEGIES." HE CHARGED LOPEZ WITH PREOCCUPATION ABOUT PRICES TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE MORE IMPORTANT FUNDAMETALS OF INVESTMENT AND EMPLOYMENT. HE SINGLED OUT THE REDUCTIONS OF THE VALUE OF THE CAT AS A PARTICULARLY UNFORTUNATE DECISION. IN A 45 MINUTE ADDRESS TO A GROUPHYF BUSINESSMEN, CONFIDENTIAL

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PASTRANA DEALT AT LENGTH WITH THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING, CONTINUITY AND THE SOUNDNESS OF HIS ECONOMIC POLICIES. THESE POLICIES, HE SAID, ARE STILL THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE ECONOMY AND SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN CHANGED. REFERRING T

TO THE ECONOMIC EMERGENCY, HE SAID DEVELOPMENT REQUIRED
CONSENSUS POLITICS WHICH ALONE COULD GENERATE
OEE REQUIRED BUSINESS CONFIDENCE. VAKY

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